

**Douglas County
Nevada**



**The Douglas County Handbook
for Effective Boards and
Committees**

2014

Douglas County
Board of County Commissioners
(2014)

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Congratulations on your appointment to serve on one of Douglas County's citizen advisory committees. The Board of County Commissioners is pleased that you are willing to serve in this important capacity. We have confidence in your ability to study all sides of the issues and make recommendations on your insight and experience as a concerned member of the community. You are about to begin a challenging and rewarding experience, and I want to thank you in advance for all the time, thought and effort you undoubtedly will devote to this job.

I am proud to say that Douglas County is a professional organization that relies both on paid professional staff and the volunteers that advise the Board of Commissioners on a wide range of issues. We all share a common bond as people concerned about Douglas County, with a role to play in shaping its future.

Membership on advisory committees and boards is a satisfying and challenging experience, and often a dramatic responsibility. Members are responsible for regularly attending meetings, understanding the duties of their positions, and consistently working and voting in a manner that will contribute to the betterment of the community as a whole.

As a committee member, you are part of a team. Many of the committees are advisory in nature, and will advise the Board of County Commissioners and staff on the needs, obligations, and responsibilities of the County as seen by the committee. The Board of County Commissioners, however, with few exceptions, has the ultimate responsibility for policy decisions. Committee members serve as a vital link in providing citizen input toward decisions. On behalf of the Board of County Commissioners, thank you for taking on this responsibility.

You are probably eager to get to work immediately. This handbook has been prepared to make your new assignment easier. It presents information about the County organization and lets you know about other advisory groups as well. I hope you find it helpful.

Douglas County

Doug N. Johnson
Chair

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HISTORY OF DOUGLAS COUNTY

Douglas County is a political subdivision of the State of Nevada, operating under provisions of Title 20 of Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS). On November 25, 1861, Douglas County became one of the first nine counties established by the first Nevada Territorial Legislature, with the county seat located in the town of Genoa. The county was retained when the territory became a state on October 31, 1864. Douglas County is named for Stephen A. Douglas, a former United States Senator from Illinois, who opposed Lincoln in the 1860 election for President.

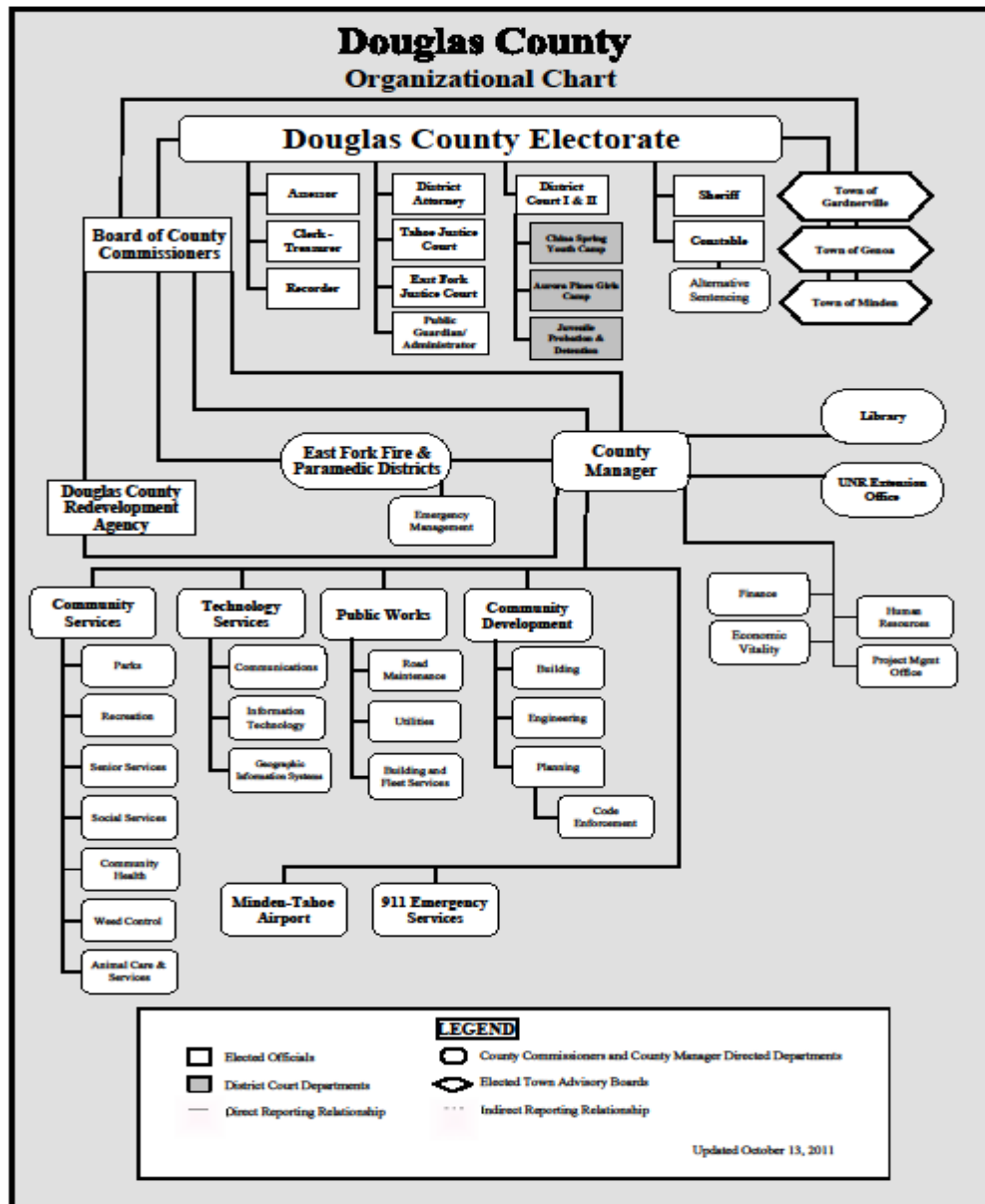
Douglas County is the site of some of Nevada's earliest development. Many small communities are scattered along the base of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range, remnants of some of the first towns in the state. A good number of these communities were established in the 1850's as trading posts and centers of ranching and farming. Genoa, originally known as Mormon Station, is the oldest of these and was settled in 1851. In 1910, the Douglas County Courthouse in Genoa was badly damaged by fire. This disaster, along with a population decline within the town of Genoa and subsequent growth in the town of Minden, prompted the Nevada Legislature to change the location of the county seat during the 1915 session. Today, the county seat is located in the town of Minden.



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COUNTY GOVERNMENT

County residents elect officials to provide community leadership and administration. Currently, the county operates under a commission-manager form of government. Douglas County government includes elected officials, departments, boards, commissions, and committees.



The Board of County Commissioners (the Board), the governing body of the County, is comprised of five members who are elected at-large by district to serve four-year, overlapping terms. Commissioners perform this community service with limited compensation. The Chair of the Board, elected by the five members, presides over public meetings. The Board provides County leadership, develops

policies to guide the County in delivering services and achieving community goals, and encourages resident awareness and involvement.

The Board also presides as the Board of Adjustments, Liquor Board, Gaming License Board, Tahoe-Douglas Transportation District Board, Water District Board, Redevelopment Agency Board, and East Fork Fire District and Paramedic Districts Board. The County Commissioners hold meetings as a Board on the first Thursday of each month in the historic County Court House (Administration Building) in Minden, Nevada, and on the third Thursday of each month in Stateline, Nevada, in the Tahoe Transportation Center. The agendas are posted at several locations, including: the Douglas County Administration Buildings at Stateline and Minden, the Judicial and Law Enforcement Center, the Gardnerville Post Office, Minden Post Office and the Douglas County Library in Minden.

The unincorporated Towns of Gardnerville, Genoa, and Minden are governed by their own separate elected town advisory boards in those areas for which authority has been granted to them.

The Douglas County Public Library is governed by a Board of Trustees and administered by an appointed Library Director. An appointed Fire Chief oversees the East Fork Fire & Paramedic Districts, all East Fork fire stations, including paid staff and volunteer firefighters. Fire and paramedic services in the Tahoe area are provided by the Tahoe Douglas Fire District that has a separate elected Board.

The various departments, boards, commissions, and committees within Douglas County government provide a full range of services to residents. Services provided by the County include:

- Airport
- Animal Control
- Building Safety
- Fire Protection and Paramedic Service
- General Administrative Services
- Zoning and Code Enforcement
- Law Enforcement
- Street Construction and Maintenance
- Judicial Services
- District Attorney
- Assessor
- Clerk
- Recorder
- Parks and Recreation
- Water and Sewer Services
- Welfare and Social Services
- Senior Services
- Weed Control

Boards, Committees, Councils, and Commissions

The term “committee” is used throughout this document to refer to the various boards, committees, councils and commissions appointed by the Board.

Advisory committees for the County are generally standing bodies established by the Board and appointed by the Board to provide on-going citizen input to major policy areas. Some committees are established as required by the Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) and have duties prescribed by law. Appointments vary in length, and the terms are staggered to provide for continuity. The responsibilities of the members generally include:

- 1) Provide on-going recommendations to the Board concerning specific program areas.
- 2) Holding public meetings to solicit community input on current issues.
- 3) Identifying issues which the advisory committee feels should be addressed by the Board or staff.

Policy Making

In keeping with Douglas County’s philosophy of citizen involvement, the Board appoints citizens to committees to assist it in formulating county policy, and carrying out responsibilities delineated in NRS. The strength and success of the Douglas County government is to a large degree reflective of the quality of services performed by these volunteers.

Within the County structure, many committees equally serve in an advisory capacity to the Board. Those committees are:

911 Surcharge Advisory Committee
Airport Advisory Committee
Genoa Historic District Commission
Parks and Recreation Commission
Senior Services Advisory Council
Water Conveyance Advisory Committee

Other committees within the County structure are appointed by the Board, but have duties and reporting responsibilities prescribed by NRS. Those committees are:

Board of Equalization
Carson Water Subconservancy District
Douglas County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife
Law Library
Library Board of Trustees
Planning Commission
Regional Transportation Commission

Relationship of the Board of County Commissioners and Advisory Committees

When a committee's role is advisory to the Board, there must be two-way communication so that the committees are aware of the Board's long and short term goals, and that the Board is receptive to input from the committees.

At times the Board will not concur with the recommendations of the committees, but this should not discourage committees in their work. Committee input will be weighed carefully with other information the Board receives. The Board may have additional information or need to balance a committee's recommendations with other county priorities.

The following are some suggestions to remember as a good guide for finding your way around the political environment:

- 1) Committee members are appointed by the Board, and most appointments are for a term of two to four years. Committee members are generally eligible for reappointment.
- 2) Each committee member has an obligation to vote his or her conscience and will have to weigh conflicts between personal viewpoints and what he or she perceives as the public's interest.
- 3) Contact with Board members should always be open, but not used to circumvent the staff or committee decisions.
- 4) Committee members should never willingly or openly embarrass the staff or the Board.
- 5) The committee should assist the Board in developing public trust and confidence in the advisory committee system.
- 6) Should a controversy or conflict arise within the committee, counsel and guidance are available from the staff. However, it would be improper for an individual committee member to attempt to influence or persuade the Board to assume a posture which may be in opposition to the committee's position as a whole.
- 7) Should a split opinion exist on committee action, the majority report sent as the recommendation to the Board should be accompanied by an explanation relating reasons for any dissent.
- 8) It is okay to disagree with staff's recommendation or the Board's decision. You will find this to be the exception.

Committees and Staff

A staff liaison is assigned to most committees to act as secretary to prepare agendas, and to research and investigate questions raised by the committee. Staff may provide reports and information for the committee's consideration. In most cases, the staff liaison will be responsible for letting the committee know what is happening in the county government, identifying issues that need committee attention, and suggesting alternatives for the committee to consider. Staff recommendations may not always be accepted by the committee, but it is important to develop a good relationship between the staff liaison and the committee members so that reasonable solutions can be derived.

On occasion, staff may provide recommendations to the Board that differ partially or completely from the committee's recommendation. The following are some suggestions for establishing and maintaining good relationships between the staff and committees:

- 1) Contacts need to be made with the staff members assigned to the committee rather than other county employees. When an individual committee member wants to contact higher level supervisors, the committee member must notify the assigned staff liaison of this contact.
- 2) Contact with staff liaisons are to remain clearly within the framework of the committee assignments.
- 3) Committee members will not ask for individual reports, favors, or special considerations.
- 4) Citizen complaints heard by committee members are to be directed to the staff liaison assigned to the committee.
- 5) Committee members should keep in mind that staff liaisons are limited by other duties given to them by their supervisors, and may not be able to carry out every recommendation given by the committee.

Operating Procedures

General Guidelines

Regular committee meetings are noticed as provided for under Nevada's Open Meeting Law.

Agendas

Written agendas for all committee meetings are prepared in advance of the meeting by the staff. All agendas must be prepared in accordance with the Open Meeting Law and will contain the following:

- 1) The time, place and location of the meeting
- 2) A clear and complete list of all the topics scheduled to be considered during the meeting
- 3) A description of the items on which action may be taken
- 4) Designated period for public comments

Meeting and Committee Guidelines

Meeting Attendance and Voting

- 1) Committee members are expected to attend all meetings. Committee members should notify staff if they cannot attend a scheduled meeting, prior to the posting of the agenda if possible.
- 2) Each committee has guidelines to deal with excessive absences, but generally, any member who is absent three or more successive meetings, may be removed from that committee.
- 3) Voting and Quorum: Business may only take place at regular meetings if a quorum of the committee members is present.
- 4) Abstaining from a vote: When a member of a committee is required to abstain from voting, the member should not participate in discussions or influence the other committee members or staff. If a committee member decides to abstain from a vote, he or she should state reasons for abstaining and remain silent during discussions on the subject. Whenever possible, committee members should actually leave the room during discussion and voting. The minutes should also state that the member did not participate in discussion of the matter. Members may abstain only when legally required to do so.

General Order of Business

The following is a general order of business for conducting meetings:

- 1) Roll call
- 2) Reading and approval of last meeting's minutes
- 3) Public comment
- 4) Reports from committees and staff

- 5) Action items
- 6) Correspondence
- 7) Adjournment

Minutes

Minutes of all regular meetings of the committee will be kept by the committee secretary or staff. Committee meetings are taped as required by the Nevada Revised Statutes and to facilitate the preparation of minutes. The minutes will generally contain the names of members of the committee and staff present, the vote by each member, a summary of all pertinent discussions, and actions taken by the committee, the names of members of the public who speak, and reasons for abstentions and “no” votes. Minutes are not verbatim – rather, minutes are a summary of the meeting.

Public Hearing Procedures

Public hearings may take place at any committee meeting. The general procedure is as follows:

- 1) The chairman announces the next item on the agenda, and asks for speakers or applicants to come forward, and allows adequate time for rebuttal. Speakers are recognized by the Chair before speaking and asked to state their name and address for the record.
- 2) The committee addresses questions to staff.
- 3) The chairman calls on the speaker or applicant for additional information or comments.
- 4) The chairman calls for other citizens who wish to comment for the record.
- 5) The chairman calls for discussion by committee members.
- 6) The chairman calls for a motion on the item discussed; a second for the motion, and a vote.

Role of the Chairman

The chairman is the key to a properly functioning committee. The chairman has the important duty of ensuring that meetings operate efficiently and according to the rules of the committee, if any. The Chairman must also maintain the unity of the committee. Therefore, choosing a chairman and vice-chairman is an important committee task.

Some General Rules for an Effective Chair:

- 1) The chairman must ensure that meetings are run by the rules, if adopted, and that they move along without delay, but be fair and open enough to allow individuals to speak without being unfairly restricted or cut off.
- 2) The chairman should see that the committee addresses the major issues before it and does not become sidetracked by insignificant concerns.
- 3) The chairman should attempt to educate the public about the policies and processes of the County and the committee.
- 4) The chairman should attempt to bridge the differences between committee members so that a consensus may be reached.
- 5) The chairman should be the last member to give his or her opinion after all others have spoken.
- 6) The chairman should be capable of representing the committee to other groups.
- 7) The vice-chairman should also be an effective leader, since he or she will run the meetings and represent the committee in the chairman's absence.
- 8) The chairman should make sure the agenda is followed and extra discussion on items not on the agenda is stopped.
- 9) The chairman can vote!
- 10) All speakers, including committee members, staff, and the public, should be recognized by the Chair before speaking.

Suggestions for Managing Speakers

- 1) Request the names of all speakers for purposes of identification, and for a clear public record.
- 2) Keep speaker's presentations brief. A maximum of five minutes for a speech and three minutes for supporting statements is a good rule of thumb.
- 3) Remarks should be directed to the merits of the issue being discussed, not to the character of the speakers or other individuals.

Tips for Controlling Meetings

- 1) Limit time for speakers, within fair and reasonable guidelines.

- 2) Afford due process to all speakers and issues by consistently following the order of business and public hearing procedures.
- 3) Bring all issues to a vote after full presentation and discussion by committee.
- 4) Do not waste time. Conduct discussion only after all those wishing to be heard have spoken.
- 5) Disclose any conflicts of interest and state abstentions for the record.

Conflict of Interest

The Code of Ethical Standards is established by NRS Chapter 281 to govern the conduct of public officers and employees. It also applies to committee members appointed by Douglas County. It states that a public officer or employee shall not:

- 1) Seek or accept any gift, service, favor, employment, engagement, emolument or economic opportunity which would tend improperly to influence a reasonable person in his position to depart from the faithful and impartial discharge of his public duties.
- 2) A public officer or employee shall not use his position in government to secure or grant unwarranted privileges, preferences, exemptions or advantages for himself, any business entity in which he has a significant pecuniary interest, or any person to whom he has a commitment in a private capacity to the interests of that person.

When you have an “interest” (which is a benefit or detriment accruing to you as a result of your decision in the matter) in an item or a commitment to others you should:

- 1) Well before the item is heard, privately give all the surrounding facts to and ask for advice from the body’s legal counsel, then follow the advice.
- 2) When required by this law, you must make a sufficient disclosure, whether you vote or abstain, at the beginning of the item to the chair and members of the body by:
 - a. describing your “interest” or commitment, and
 - b. its potential effect on you and others.

- 3) You must abstain from voting when required by law. You must consult with the District Attorney prior to abstaining. If you must abstain, you should leave your chair and move to the audience for the item.

Annual Report to the Board of County Commissioners

In December each committee is asked to prepare a brief written annual summary to the Board detailing committee activity. The summary should highlight important decisions as well as difficulties experienced or recommendations that may be pertinent. If desired, the chairperson of each advisory committee will have an opportunity to elaborate on the report at a Commission meeting in January or February.

BOARDS, COMMITTEES, COUNCILS AND COMMISSIONS SERVING DOUGLAS COUNTY

911 Surcharge Advisory Committee

Members: 5 members

Meets: as needed

Term: 2-year

Staff: Ron Sagen, 911 Emergency Services Manager

Develop a 5-year master plan to enhance or improve the telephone system for reporting an emergency in the County and to oversee any money allocated for that purpose.

Airport Advisory Committee

Members: 7 members

Meets: Third Wednesday every other month

Term: 2-year, with a 2 consecutive term limit

Staff: Bobbi Thompson, Airport Manager

Provide advice on policy matters concerning the management and development of the Minden-Tahoe Airport property.

Board of Equalization

Members: 5 members

Meets: as called

Term: 4-year

Staff: Ted Thran, Clerk-Treasurer

Serve to address property tax appeals by County residents.

Carson Water Subconservancy District

Members: 11 members (5 from Douglas County)

Meets: third Wednesday of the month

Term: 4-year

Staff: Edwin James, General Manager, Carson Water Subconservancy District

Provide advice and recommendations for water issues and projects impacting Douglas County and the Carson River drainage area.

Douglas County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife

Members: 5 members

Meets: as called

Term: 3-year

Staff: Lorraine Diedrichsen, Recording Secretary

Provide recommendations to the State Board of Wildlife Commissioners for setting season on fishing, hunting, and trapping, and other wildlife matters in Douglas County.

Genoa Historic District Commission

Members: 5 members

Meets: as called

Term: 2-year

Review proposed building changes or development plans within the district.

Law Library Board

Members: 7 members

Meets: as called

Term: 2-year

Staff: District Court personnel

Govern and manage the law library of the District Court.

Library Board of Trustees

Members: 5 members

Meets: as called

Term: 4-year with 2-year consecutive term limit

Staff: Linda Deacy, Library Director

Governing authority for the Douglas County Library. The Board has statutory responsibility for the operation of the Library. Provide direction on policy matters pertaining to the operation, expansion, and level of service provided by the Douglas County Library.

Parks and Recreation Commission

Members: 7 members

Meets: first Tuesday of each month

Term: 2-year

Staff: Scott Morgan, Community Services Director

Provide advice on policy matters pertaining to Douglas County parks resources and recreation activities

Planning Commission

Members: 7 members

Meets: second Tuesday of each month

Term: 4-year

Staff: Mimi Moss, Community Development Director

Provide advice on land use planning matters, review development applications for compliance with County plans/ordinances, and provide oversight in the Master Plan preparation.

Regional Transportation Commission

Members: 3 members (1 appointed by the Board of Commissioners)

Meets: as called

Term: 2-year

Staff: Jeff Foltz, Senior Civil Engineer

Provide advice regarding existing and future transportation needs and issues in Douglas County.

Senior Services Advisory Council

Members: 9 members (6 appointed by the Board of Commissioners)

Meets: Second Monday of each month

Term: 2-year

Staff: Scott Morgan, Community Services Director

Provide advice regarding the operation of the senior center, the senior nutrition program, and other senior programs.

Water Conveyance Advisory Committee

Members: 5 members

Meets: first Monday of each month

Term: 2-year

Staff: Matthew Setty, JBR Environmental Consultants, Inc.

Provide representation to irrigation or ditch associations and representation to both forks of the Carson River and the impacts of development on the irrigation/ditch systems within Douglas County.

*****Information in this handbook comes from the Douglas County Code, the Nevada Revised Statutes, Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, and similar handbooks from the cities of Aiken, South Carolina; Lenoir, North Carolina and Corte Madera, California.

For additional information contact:

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